

Message from the Advocate

In my role as a Seniors' Advocate responsible for systemic advocacy it is important to listen to seniors and those that support them, to use this information to advocate at all levels for change to improve services and to educate on these issues. This edition will detail our advocacy work over the last three months in each of these areas.



Review the Public Engagement section to learn about our community engagement and education activities. In addition, I shared the perspective of seniors as a panelist at the Premiers' Roundtable on Gender Equity and provided an education session to nurses through the College of Registered Nurses NL.

Check out the Advocacy Actions section below for some of the new approaches to advocacy we have taken over the last couple of months, including: joining with Seniors' Advocates in Canada to advance the needs of seniors to decision makers in Ottawa, including Federal Seniors Minister Khera; informing the provincial government's spending decisions through a submission to the 2023/24 Budget Consultation process; and writing the government to respond to concerns raised by seniors who are unable or delayed in getting drivers medicals completed given the shortage of doctors in the province, and to address the cost of these medical given the increase in the cost of living.

In closing, March is Fraud Protection Month. In 2022, fifty seven thousand people were known victims of fraud in Canada, so we have included some resources that you may find helpful. Be aware!

Susan

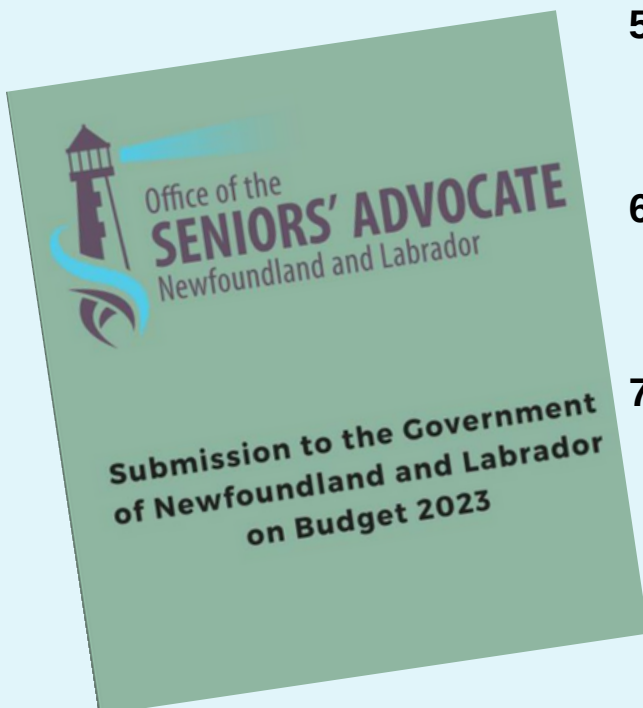
Susan Walsh
Seniors' Advocate NL

Advocacy Actions

For the first time, the Office of the Seniors' Advocate forwarded a submission to the Department of Finance to inform their thinking as they prepare governments 2023-24 budget. All of our recommendations came from what we have been hearing from seniors, families and caregivers, including in our public engagement process with more than 400 participants, and our online survey with 1,087 responses.

Here's what we have asked government to consider for its next budget:

1. Regarding the Medical Transportation Program (MTAP), increase the per kilometer allowance to what government provides employees (presently 40.89 ¢/km).
2. Government finalize the MTAP review, and in the interim:
 - reduce the deductible by 50% (only applies to island residents); and
 - waive the two week notification period for pre-paid economy airfare for urgent short notice appointments.
3. Provide the enhanced flu vaccine free for seniors aged 65 +.
4. Publicly fund the shingles vaccine for individuals aged 65 and older and people severely immunocompromised.
5. Change the financial assessment for the Provincial Hearing Aid Program to income-based.
6. Enable audiologists in private practice to perform audiology assessments and bill MCP.
7. Make driver medicals free-of-charge for seniors.



Advocacy Actions

8. While finalizing the new physician billing system, enable physicians to treat multiple health issues per visit and bill MCP appropriately.
9. Index the NL Seniors' Benefit annually.
10. Change the NL Seniors' Benefit so that seniors with income up to \$41,786 receive increased benefit.
11. Support a Basic Income policy approach which includes seniors.
12. Work with the Federal Government to ensure seniors benefits are issued twice a month, to assist seniors with low income with budgeting.
13. Eligibility for any cost-of-living benefits be set at a maximum family income of \$40,000 to \$50,000 annually.
14. Address homelessness through increases to affordable, accessible, safe, low-cost housing for seniors.
15. Expand/continue to expand the budgets for the Provincial Home Repair Program and Home Modification Program.

To read the full submission please visit:
<https://www.seniorsadvocatenl.ca/pdfs/BudgetSubmission2023.pdf>



Advocacy Actions



In February, Susan joined Canada's other Seniors' Advocates: Isobel MacKenzie (BC) and Kelly Lamrock (NB) in Ottawa. In addition to learning from each other, the Advocates met with the leaders and decision makers listed below to inform their work and advocate for improvements to services for seniors. One collective voice can have a stronger impact!

- Federal Minister for Seniors Kamal Khera
- Canadian Institute for Health Information
- Accreditation Canada
- Conservative Party Shadow Minister for Seniors MP Anna Roberts
- NDP MP Rachel Blaney
- Patricia Bovey, Deputy Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology
- Nora Spinks, Chair, National Seniors Council and Kristen Underwood, Director General Seniors and Pensions Policy Secretariat HRSDC

Discussions between the advocates and Minister Khera focused on how the federal government would ensure support for new national standards for long-term care, federal considerations of an aging at home benefit and improvements to federal income benefits.

The Advocates spoke about the need for better supports to assist seniors to age well in their own homes and the importance of age-friendly communities.

Check out the news release to read more about their first in-person meeting. Available on our website or by clicking the photo of the news release. A link to hear a media interview about the trip is noted below.



Advocacy Actions

Issue:

1. Seniors who do not have access to a family doctor have expressed concern that they are unable to have the drivers medical form completed within required timelines and their license becomes expired.
2. Seniors are concerned about the cost of medicals, especially those on fixed income, with the rising cost of living.

OSA Action:

The Seniors' Advocate wrote to Minister Sarah Stoodley, Digital Government and ServiceNL and Minister Tom Osborne, Health and Community Services, outlining the concerns, offering suggestions and seeking resolutions to ensure: 1) seniors can continue to drive legitimately while awaiting medical clearance, and 2) for the cost of medicals to be covered under MCP.

Issue 1 Government Response:

The following is Minister Stoodley's positive response:

"It is our preference to work with drivers who face challenging situations to identify reasonable options. MRD remains flexible in its support of drivers who struggle to meet this obligation. In particular, MRD provides options that allow healthy drivers to maintain their license while working to meet the requirements of the medical driver fitness standard. MRD will accept medical forms completed by a variety of health professionals. The scope of acceptable professionals may include, but is not limited to, physicians including residents and specialists, and nurse practitioners."

Resolution:

Seniors unable to access a health professional to complete their drivers medical can call Motor Registration Medical Section at 1-877-636-6867, select option #2, to discuss options.

Issue 2 Government Response:

The following is Minister Osborne's positive response:

"...following a Health in All Policies approach, HCS is actively exploring the feasibility of including this as an MCP insured service.

Resolution:

While no commitment was made, the Minister appears to be supportive of our recommendation. We will await the 2023/24 provincial budget to confirm a decision.

The image shows a 'Medical Examination Report' form from the Newfoundland Labrador Motor Registration Division. The form is titled 'Medical Examination Report Concerning a Person's Ability to Drive' and includes a section for 'Applicant Information' with fields for Name, Driver's License #, and Date. Below this is a section for 'An answer of yes to either question will require certification in the comments section below.' followed by a grid of 19 numbered questions. The questions cover various medical conditions such as Visual Problems, Cardiac conditions, Hearing Loss, Diabetes Mellitus, Epilepsy, and Mental Illness. Each question has 'Yes' and 'No' checkboxes. At the bottom of the form, there is a section for 'Comments (Use a Separate Sheet if Necessary)', a section for 'Name and address of Physician (in block letters)', and a footer with contact information for the Motor Registration Division.

Public Engagement

In January, the Seniors' Advocate welcomed the opportunity to listen to seniors at Masonic Park. She also shared the perspectives of seniors at the Premier's Roundtable on Gender Equity.

In February, she traveled to Lewisporte to speak with seniors as well as "community catalysts" who are working with seniors in their community.

On a stormy day in February, the Seniors' Advocate also met with members of the Catholic Women's League, Divine Mercy Parish.

In March, Advocacy Consultant Tanya Billard presented at a Lunch and Learn session with the Buckmaster Circle Seniors Group.



Media Interviews

On January 27, 2023, the Seniors' Advocate was interviewed by NTV News about the rising cost of home heating fuel and the impact on all seniors, but especially seniors with lower incomes.

[Click here to watch](#)

On March 2, 2023, the Seniors' Advocate was interviewed by NTV News about the importance of the Long Term Care and Personal Care Home review.

[Click here to watch](#)



On February 3, 2023 the Seniors' Advocate was On Target with Linda Swain. They discussed Susan's visit to Ottawa to meet with the other Seniors' Advocates, government officials and organizations.



<https://soundcloud.com/vocm/friday-feb-3rd-provincial-seniors-advocate-susan-walsh?in=vocm/sets/on-target-st-johns-with-linda>

Community Engagement

We're on Facebook!



Seniors Advocate NL

We heard from many seniors that Facebook is the most used social media platform, and we are trying to reach as many seniors as possible. So please follow us on Facebook by following these steps:

- 1) At the top of the page on the right, click the picture that looks like a magnifying glass
- 2) This should open up a screen that you can type in (the area you are going to type in will say Search Facebook). Type Seniors Advocate NL (you don't have to use capital letters), then click the search button (at the bottom of your screen if using a cell phone) or (the enter button on your computer keyboard)
- 3) Then when you see our page click the "Follow" or "Like" button

March is Fraud Prevention Month

This year's theme is "What's in a fraudster's toolbox?"

The Federal Government has a number of resources on their website to help you identify frauds and scams, and ways to avoid them. [Click here](#) for the website.

It's important to always report a fraud! Contact the RNC/RCMP if you believe you have been a victim of fraud/scam.

The RCMP also have a Seniors Guidebook to Safety and Security, which includes a number of safety tips for in your home and community, information on fraud and scams, as well as programs and services

[Click here](#) to see the guidebook



Community Information



Supporting the Office of the Seniors' Advocate's recommendation, the Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs announced \$400,000 for a new one-time Building Age-Friendly Community Grant to help municipalities upgrade their communities to accommodate the needs of seniors and individuals as they age. Our office strongly supports Age-Friendly Communities and any initiative to help municipalities reach that designation. We look forward to seeing how the successful applicants utilize the grant toward an Age-Friendly Community.



The Federal Government is providing a one-time top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit, to help low income renters with the cost of rent. Applications are open until March 31, 2023. Eligible applicants can apply online or by phone 1-800-282-8079.

It's Tax Season!

Don't forget to file your taxes. You may be eligible for certain benefit and credit payments, such as GST/HST or Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). The CRA indicates that the longer you wait to file your taxes, the more likely payments will be interrupted.

The CRA has a Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, where eligible individuals can have their taxes done for free. These are offered in-person or virtually.

Visit the CRA website or [click here](#) to find a tax clinic.





Our Team

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**To receive updates from the Office of the Seniors' Advocate,
contact the office to be added to our email list.**



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